



## History

In 1994, the Maryland Commission on African American History and Culture, a unit of the Department of Housing and Community Development (“DHCD”), completed an initiative to identify and evaluate the most important African American historical and cultural sites, buildings, collections and other resources in Maryland. At the same time, the Department of Business and Economic Development also completed a statewide analysis of existing and potential state resources related to African American heritage tourism.

After careful analysis of the historical inventory and tourism study, DHCD and the African American leadership in the Maryland General Assembly concluded that there was a substantial need and significant potential for a statewide museum to protect and interpret Maryland’s African American history and culture. By Executive Order, former Governor William Donald Schaefer appointed the Maryland Museum of African American History and Culture Commission (the “Commission”), which consisted of 14 experts in the field of museum administration, humanities, fundraising, museum design, business, African American history and culture, architecture and community relations.

The Commission hosted more than 20 focus groups with school groups, museum professionals, educators, and communities across Maryland to determine the feasibility of a new museum in Baltimore. In 1998, the Commission was later formalized into the Maryland African American Museum Corporation (the “Museum”), with a 32-member Board of Directors as a 501(c)(3) organization and an independent unit of the executive branch of the State of Maryland. An Executive Director was hired to manage the museum. DHCD provided technical and administrative support through its Exhibition Services Program, Office of Museum Services, and fiscal, legal and personnel divisions. The

Department of General Services provides technical support and assistance to the Museum through the Office of Facilities Planning, Engineering and Construction.

The State of Maryland charged the Museum to serve three primary interests: (1) **education**; (2) **preservation and interpretation**; and, (3) **tourism**. Recognizing the powerful impact the Museum could have on the education of Maryland's youth, the Maryland State Department of Education created a partnership with the Museum to reach more than 850,000 students and 50,000 teachers with a state-of-the-art curriculum and teacher training to help close the African American achievement gap and increase understanding among all students.

The State of Maryland has committed \$30 million toward the design and capital construction costs of the Museum. In addition, the State of Maryland has committed to providing 75% of the Museum's operating costs until the third year of operation to the public; thereafter, the State's operating support will reduce to 50% of the Museum's operating budget. The City of Baltimore, equally committed to this undertaking, donated the land on which the Museum will be located, for a 98-year, \$1-a-year lease.

In June 2002, the Reginald F. Lewis Foundation awarded the Museum a \$5 million endowment to the Museum's educational programs. In gratitude by museum officials, and an unanimous decision by the State Board of Public Works, the museum was renamed The Reginald F. Lewis Museum of Maryland African American History and Culture. Reginald F. Lewis was a native Marylander who became the first African American to own a fortune 500 corporation, TLC Beatrice Foods International.

The permanent exhibition will explore the diversity of the African American experience in Maryland told through individual stories, from historical perspectives to contemporary times. The sections are collected into three content areas, ***Building Maryland, Building America, Things Hold, Lines Connect***, and ***Strength of Mind***. The inaugural exhibition consists of media, images and objects on

loan from various historical educational and museum institutions throughout the state of Maryland and the region, including private collectors of historical memorabilia that provide insight into the lives of African Americans. The inaugural exhibition will highlight the experiences of famous and not-so-famous African Americans from Maryland, telling stories that depict the tragedy and triumphs of the African American experience. The museum will highlight untold stories and little known facts about the history of Frederick Douglass, Billie Holiday, Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, Harriet Tubman, and Benjamin Banneker to name just a few. It will also highlight those contemporary individuals such as Juanita Jackson Mitchell, Esther McCready, Thurgood Marshall and Kweisi Mfume who have pioneered against injustice and for equality.

With exciting and dynamic facilities, including an oral history recording and listening studio, a conservation lab, storage facilities, an information resource center, two classrooms (one of which will be equipped with distance learning), permanent and temporary exhibition space, a 200-seat theater, a museum shop and café, and flexible public program areas, the Museum will help preserve and interpret Maryland's world-renowned African American history and culture. Finally, centrally located on the East Coast in Baltimore's Inner Harbor visited by more than 14 million tourists a year, the Museum will provide an exciting place for visitors to discover Maryland's rich African American culture.

The museum will collaborate with other art institutions, cultural attractions, educators and local artists to bridge art and culture in order to build a collective force and cohesiveness that fosters positive social change. The museum will have something for everyone and will be a welcomed addition to the region's multicultural and artist communities. For additional information, visit the museum's website at [www.AfricanAmericanCulture.org](http://www.AfricanAmericanCulture.org) or contact the corporate offices at 443-263-1800.